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Ten Years Later

AN ADDRESS

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1894—1904

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given before the

All Around Dickens Club

April 6, 1904

by

Mrs. Adelaide H. Garland

Founder and President
of the Society

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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Ten Years Later

AN ENGLISH writer and journalist recently expressed his opinion that a considerable amount of Dickens's work, especially in pathetic and heroic passages, is artificial and pompous, that "the end of David Copperfield is a very miserable ending," calls Agnes "unendurable," and Little Nell in the Churchyard and the repentance of Dombey "a stilted minuet of literature."

The influence of such writing is misleading to a younger generation of readers.

An English correspondent writing upon the subject of this essay describes it as "a class of writing that agnostics are made of if the writer changes his theme from Dickens to theology" and expresses the conviction that it is written much in the same way as a barrister argues the cause of a guilty client! As far back as 1892 a New England journalist writing upon the "*Decadence of Dickens*"! said: "If some one will not arise and boom Mr. Boz we may soon find in volumes of extracts and selections, all that the public

cares to know of Charles Dickens, and Gamp and Prig, Swiveller and the Marchioness, poor Jo and little Paul, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller and David Copperfield will appear in detached fashion, while Martin Chuzzlewit, The Pickwick Papers and The Old Curiosity Shop move slowly but surely toward the oblivion that has long since swallowed up Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey" etc., etc. One of our foremost American writers at the same time was also constantly asserting with iconoclastic purpose that the mood and need of his own time contributed alone to Charles Dickens's success. Of the exquisite fantasy, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, into which is woven with such delicacy an all-great love in its most sacred aspect, he wrote: "I suppose something could be falser at all points but I do not know how," and of the incidents of the tale he said: "all are more exasperatingly impossible than anything imaginable outside of the Dickens world where they have their being, and they are more insufferable because they are rooted in certain elemental truths of human nature, which they falsify," etc.

At that time I had been welcoming frequently to my home three or four young girls in whose mental development I was interested

and who pursued under slight guidance, in many pleasant hours in my library, a loving enthusiastic study of the early English poets, with thoroughness, enjoyment, and digestion, learning the rich beauty and worth of our language from the far-away misty time of "renownèd Chaucer" down through the centuries to the singing season of the prince in the kingly succession of poets.

Then came a desire that these young people should become aware of the real, true Dickens, for whom I had such heart interest and match with the love and admiration that I knew the reading of his books would arouse, those poor and unfair criticisms that were circulating and that it was so difficult to be patient under. The little circle of students was enlarged and that was the beginning of a society that for ten years past has been devoted to the honouring of a great name and to the fascinating study of his books. The first INCORPORATED Dickens Society so far as known in the world. The All Around Dickens Club of NEW ENGLAND. The avowed purposes of the Society are to study the writings of Charles Dickens and to create a greater interest in them, and as this is inseparable from an affection for the author, such incidents of his life, character, person-

ality, and friendships AS ARE AUTHENTICATED have always held a proportionate place.

My own affection and gratitude carries me beyond criticism, and I would do him honour from a grateful heart. I know that his heart was a well of gentleness, kindness, charity and purity. The more we learn of the nobility of his character and his intense sympathy for his fellowmen, the more we recognize the source of his creations.

Early performances that Dickens had only contempt for and devoutly wished forgotten, like *The Village Coquettes*, and farces like *The Strange Gentlemen* we would not offend by reviving, but the first year of our consociation we read together those sketches in which a careful reader will readily see the foreshadowing of later and larger work: Walter Bagehot said Dickens described London like a special correspondent for posterity and upon our memory lies with distinctness his *London Streets in the Morning*, and the deep human interest with which the picture of hours in the noiseless city before the sunrise, is penned and hours after daybreak, the business of the day beginning, and the streets at night, with the cold, thin rain drizzling down upon the miserable, famishing, fallen creatures of the street,

"creatures borne down by excess of misery and destitution." It is marvellously compassionate writing for a youthful pen. The little home in *London Recreations* with hyacinth glasses in the parlour windows and geranium pots in its little court is almost the first of those pictures he loved to paint showing humble women in quiet domestic lives. I could ask no calmer nor more peaceful twilight of my life as the years roll "deadening the bright hues of early hopes and feelings" than such an one as Dickens outlined of the old wife of that sketch in her quiet domestic life. Thus early he began to create a sympathy for the trifling joys of humble daily living.

In the second year of our association we dipped into what Thomas Hood called "the goodness of Pickwickedness," the book undervalued by its author, but through which what responsibility was aroused! What hope expressed in poor human nature.

We had most pleasant journeyings when we took the coach from the Golden Cross with Mr. Pickwick and his friends and started out into that country that is forevermore "the real Dickens Land," for which our author cherished an enduring love all his life. He took the Pickwickians to the spots he loved best, to the

old minster town of Rochester (and there are few spots in the world so pleasant to see), to Chatham, "a dream of chalk and drawbridges and mastless ships in a muddy stream" but full of interest because of its association with Dickens's childhood when, to quote Thomas Hood again, "he had sky-blue in his cup," to Bury St. Edmunds, on the river Lark, and explored its Abbey and its lovely old Abbot's Bridge, to Ipswich with its fine churches and to the Great White Horse Inn on its main thoroughfare, where according to his valet Mr. Pickwick "let his judgement go a wisiting," to beloved Coventry, to the old sea-port town of Bristol with its life and literature and its charm, and Bath with its associations with Landor, and Birmingham; all were visited by us in the company of Samuel Pickwick and his friends. Dr. Johnson said, "a sojourn in a comfortable inn is one of the chief pleasures of life" and in our readings we became at home in the exhilarating comfort of many cheerful hostelries. In famous inns and secluded inns and enthusiasm reached a climax because the master had chronicled them so enchantingly. We ought to be fairly familiar now with the interiors of those still standing and those also sacrificed to modern ideas. Of all the inns, the birth-

place of Pickwick, now demolished, had most pathetic interest. There was *living* interest crowded into "the three rooms of Furnival's Inn." The historical old Spaniards, threatened with improvement, is one of the most interesting in England; here once the Kit-Cat Club met with a membership of the greatest gentlemen in England, Addison and Steele and Swift and Dryden, Prior and Congreve, but nothing was ever more real there than the tea drinking of Mrs. Bardell and her friends and the conjugal disputes of Mr. and Mrs. Raddle. Dorking is phenomenal for the old inns on its steep streets with their second stories overhanging the sidewalks. In the inn where Mr. Pickwick stopped in Coventry, Tennyson paraphrased the legend of Lady Godiva. The Leather Bottle "all among the cherries, apples, hops" of Kent, where Mr. Tupman found consolation is a little story-and-a-half plastered house, close on the village street. Close on the high street of Rochester stands the Bull — "best of inns." We baited at every one of the forty and more and, like Don Quixote, who always mistook inns for castles, thought we had royal entertainment. Our parting hours with Mr. Pickwick were devoted to contemplating with him in his retire-

ment, the paintings in the Dulwich Gallery. At the conclusion of our readings from the *Pickwick Papers* a creditable examination was taken.

Very early in our history an interest began to be shown in our venture that has spread widely and never shown abatement to this hour. The most precious of the encouraging words in those earlier days came from the noble and honoured friend, the incomparable woman of Dickens's household, "the aunt *par excellence*," who in presenting the names for membership of Dickens's sons and daughters in England and adding thereto her own, expressed the pride that was felt that an organization like ours had developed here. The surviving daughter of Charles Dickens has expressed a delight and a deep interest in this club, that bears her father's name, and her words of gratitude and pride and friendship for her sister members of the Dickens Club have been generously expressed. Following each other in quick succession came letters of sympathy and encouragement from old and valued friends of the beloved author; from Mary Cowden-Clarke in Genoa affectionately encouraging an extended and enlarged appreciation of Dickens's productions; from great Thackeray's gifted

daughter, Mrs. Richmond Ritchie; from the loveliest of his adoring friends, Charles Kent, of whom Clement Scott said a little time ago, "Kent's sweetness of nature is quite unrivalled in my study of humanity," and from Sir Squire Bancroft, broad in catholicity of feeling. Sir Henry Irving is another who wrote that the whole scheme of the club seemed to him admirable and he shared our admiration and affection, and was glad to be numbered among students of a genius who had exercised so great an influence over three generations. The scholarly American whose sympathy with our work is perhaps most precious will forgive me I am sure if I quote him. Professor Charles Eliot Norton said, "It gratifies me to be associated with the memory of Dickens and with grateful affectionate thought of him. I honour with you the delightful memory of the man whose friends stretch in an unbroken chain round the world, and who by his writings has perhaps given more pleasure and done more good than any other writer born in his century and who did more perhaps than any man to make the lives of his fellowmen happier and better." At the time of the Queen's Jubilee, the Urban Club of London, with which, among other celebrities Dr. Johnson was in

his time associated, celebrating the diamond jubilee also of Pickwick, cabled greetings to the All Around Dickens Club with mutual love for Dickens.

A whimsical joke of Dickens's was that he really was born in Boston! We have always put the day under a rule of continuance. Cuming Walters three years ago in his English Chronicles referring to our celebrations said, the veneration and homage shown by our society to one who is a very precious English possession and one for which the nation has cause to be thankful, puts the indifference of Englishmen to shame. That reproach is now done away with, the infection of our example has been contagious and this year as you know for the first time has been imitated in England. English readers are awakening to the potent teachings of his books, their special messages, their appeals and their rebukes.

Charles Dickens has always been recognized as the promoter of Christmas joy. Christmas was his favourite theme. Among his public readings *The Carol* was his favourite. It has been our selection for many Christmas readings. The son of Dickens when he came to us two years ago wishing to consider the duty of his

membership, gave the most interesting recital of *The Carol* we have ever presented, because he gave it with a recollection of his father's reading: without apparent fatigue and with evident enjoyment he recited nearly entire the exquisite allegory. There are a few of our members who can recall the great necromancer and know what truth lies in Jeffrey's words, that it was like a return of springtime to look into Dickens's eyes! (The seniors have these advantages) and it was with an eagerness second to that with which we first looked into the fathomless eyes of the master, that we waited to hear the son repeat the familiar lines with which his father first greeted a Boston audience. Other distant members have made important contributions to our entertainment and also increased our stock of Wemmickian possessions with otherwise inaccessible gifts. The late Robert Langton sent a paper which was an amplification of opinions expressed in his book upon "The Childhood and Youth of Charles Dickens," and the late Charles Kent contributed a specially prepared and reverent tribute for one of our anniversaries, a remembrance of a purely personal and private character. Two papers from the facile pen of Edwin Webster Sanborn in one of which when

subsequently published in permanent form the Dickens Club was complimented by a dedication of the booklet. "East Anglia by Road, Rail, and Sea," a historical as well as scholarly paper, was contributed by Mr. Cuming Walters and more recently a specially prepared article for a reading here has been received, treating of Charles Dickens as a Social Reformer, showing how he impelled action in England by creating discontent with wrongs, and inspired others to labour for the cure of anomalies whose deformities he exposed. It was a clear and admirable exposition of Dickens's mental attitude towards the pressing social problems of his time. Current literature *re* Dickens CAREFULLY EDITED obtained from all-around sources is also a portion of our work. The tender fancy of *What Christmas is as we grow older*, *The Christmas Tree*, *The Elfin Chimes*, The hearthstone voices of *The Cricket*, *The Vision of Life*, *The Runaway Lovers*, and *The Seven Poor Travellers* are among our Christmas recollections, and I recall, too, a reading of *The Holiday Romance* to a room filled with little people, because HE was a part of it when he was a boy!

After *Pickwick* the selection of the next book to study was determined by the choice of the

majority for *David Copperfield.* In the texture of this book, all the world now knows there is a strong fusing of fact with fancy. The author drew upon his memories for scenes and characters and the deep, sweet thoughts in it open a wide door into the author's nature. Environment of circumstance, of locality, of friendship, contributed to the importance and enjoyment of our study. I do not share with many commentators an over-confident assignment to actual localities of scenes and persons. I am not eager to dig out things right or wrong, nor do I refuse to accord to the author's creative mind the power of mixing realities and fancies, but allow that he built his houses as our New England romancer said he did, of "materials long in use for constructing castles in the air." Over the years I have been happy to be able to give out some facts which in booksellers' phrase are difficult of procuration and will add that, to paraphrase Mr. Chester's maxim, "We are nothing if we are not accurate!" Ashby-Sterry says, "If you sail by the Dickens chart you cannot go very far wrong." Dickens joyed in the landmarks of London. One of our members, Mr. Laurence Hutton, avowing the first love in fiction of the boy he

was, says all London was a moving panorama to him of *David Copperfield.* The fair Canterbury pictures in Copperfield are more overlooked by readers than many other localities, yet the old monastic city on the pleasant Stour is prominent in the story: there is more than the dumb splendour of its Cathedral and the legends of its martyrs, its hills topped with churches and chapels, to excite love and worship. In Canterbury we came also to the warm welcome of inns. Opposite the old Checker Inn where Chaucer halted his pilgrims is the Sun Inn with many gables and latticed windows where Mr. Micawber put up, and where he and Mrs. Micawber gave "the beautiful little dinner" to David. One of the retired inns in the chief town of the Cinque Ports hanging out the sign "*The cause is altered,*" Ashby-Sterry imagined to be the one where Miss Trotwood had her ale; but the real trespass of donkeys took place at Broadstairs. In a little cottage on its sea-front Charles Dickens the Younger has pleasantly said in *Notes on some Dickens Places and People,* there lived a charming old lady the prototype (in a limited way) of Betsey Trotwood whose cakes and tea, he said, he looked back upon with unsatisfied regret.

Next to Kent, Dickens wins our love for the county of Suffolk. "The sweet civil country" Bishop Hall calls Suffolk and its grassy face looks out pleasantly from the Copperfield page. When Dickens went down to Yarmouth and found it the strangest place in the world, he told his after-time biographer that "he should try his hand at it." Those who have gone down to Yarmouth know the vivid exactness with which he framed into the sweet immortal story the old fishing port at the mouth of the Yare. The enjoyment of our readings was enhanced by descriptions of the picturesque old place from members who were familiar with its narrow streets and wyndes, its attractive inns and other landmarks. To touch ever so slightly a few of the universally known characters of the book, of his treatment of little Em'ly, Dickens wrote to M. Cerjat, that "he had long been observing that the return to virtue of a girl who had fallen had been cruelly cut off — long before Copperfield was written he had been turning the subject over in his mind and he hoped in the way he presented the subject to put it to the world in a new way and work good" and this I believe to be one of the main purposes for which Copperfield was written. In this connection

I like to repeat a comment of Andrew Lang's that "he did not know any other writer who had touched the young and absolutely disinterested belief of a little boy in a big boy, touched it so kindly and seriously as Dickens. The little Davy lost his heart to the big boy and set him up in the shrine thereof" — boys (and girls too) do it! Dickens goes no deeper down into any character than that of Steerforth. The first retrospect of the book is a delicious picture of a very young man's mind, and the writer anticipated present-day tendencies when disparity of years is no bar to a young man's choice. A familiar manner that delighted Dickens with its whimsical extravagances and as he said of another character of his invention "was the quality he wanted for the man he invented" gave us the one character in the book that stands on a pedestal alone. What a delight it must have been to the inventor to see Mr. Micawber come from his creative hand so like his happy original! and how sweet a phantom passes in and out of the book in the pictures of the adorable child-wife in her mingled prettiness and pettishness!

The reading of *The Tale of Two Cities* followed Copperfield and its masterly pictures were produced with wonderful vividness and

consistency in treatment of character and scenes. From prison shadows until the steps die out, they were given with high intellectual perception and wonderful interpretation. The readings of this club have become the touch-stone by which other readings are tested and weighed! In connection with the reading we also had many forcible studies. I recall one presentation of the aspect of the French peasantry in the days that preceded the Revolution, and another careful description of the suburb of St. Antoine — the old prisons of La Force, L' Abbaye and the Conciergerie. As a prelude to the reading of *Dombey and Son*, which was our next study, a poetic description of Lausanne, where the first chapters of Dombey were written, was given by a member who had sojourned there the previous summer. Of this place and time Dickens had written: "I don't believe there are many dots on the map of the world where we shall have left such affectionate remembrance behind us as in Lausanne." How well the many phases of character, the masterpieces of portraiture were managed in the clever readings! The spirit and tone well caught. When "the last bottle of the old Madeira was brought into the sunlight," and

the last notes of the story told, we were able to produce the review of the book in 1848 that gave so much pleasure to the author at the time from the pen of a journalist then unknown to him, kindly copied for us from the files in the British Museum.

The Dombey people dismissed, we next took up the reading of Dickens's most picturesque and perhaps most perfect work — the story of *Great Expectations*. The region where many of its scenes are laid and which Dickens said was a large slice of his life, was copiously illustrated with photographs of many places produced by one of our number who had traversed the East Anglian counties. Fair indeed are the graceful, fragrant aisles of interlacing vines in the hop gardens of Kent, sunny the quiet streets of Rochester (Dullborough, Dickens called it), and a present-day writer has wittily said: "having produced a castle and ruined it and a cathedral and restored it, it has ever since rested on its laurels!" All things in it are of the past but we never weary of the tranquil charms of the old town. In *Great Expectations* Dickens's ideal of nobility and dignity of character in the humblest is expressed in clearest note, and in the intellectual conception of the writer's

L. of C.

meaning and interpretation of his characters, rich with flavour of quaint observation, there are few that can vie with the women of this society. The discussions, the publication of which has been frequently urged, reveal a discriminating knowledge of literature and absolute and visible perception of individualities. The work is accomplished *entirely within the club.* We have no public entertainers and I may add no public entertainments. The choice audiences in which as to-day we delight are gathered exclusively by invitation.

We have only just touched the rich edge of our next book for study — *Bleak House.*

As it was in accord with the *motif* of our work, sketches of men of letters whose friendship reflected upon the author's life, especially those taken into the warmest recesses of his affections, have been introduced from time to time. Among artists Stanfield, Leech, Maclise, Cattermole, Leslie, and the Landseers. Douglas Jerrold, Talfourd, Thackeray, and Leigh Hunt among authors, and Landor by many years his senior, whose picture in *Bleak House* is so lovingly touched. The great Laurifer also, of whom Dickens was wont to say, "What a great creature he is!" The great poet and the great romancer were allied in their love

and observation of nature and more closely yet in their conception of the unseen life and love's survival, but no life was so closely interwoven with his as that of John Forster — a man of great ability. Critics and readers are still complaining that ego is written large through the volumes of his Life of Dickens, but it is a clear and definite story and just to the great genius of his subject, a true picture by his faithfulest friend.

This society is expansive in its hospitality and the friends of members are always welcome. English guests whom we have entertained have declared their hours with us to have been the happiest spent in America. There have been special days that stand apart in the calendar of the years. Among the most pleasurable, a bright and constant remembrance of the sweet maidenly presence in these rooms of two who bear the distinguished name. On one occasion we accepted the lavish and beautiful hospitality of a dear associate who is no longer on earth, at the happy Christmas time, and the story described by one of our number "of man's selfishness and parsimony conquered by untiring efforts of good spirits" was related in rooms made beautiful with the English holly.

When Mr. Hughes came to us and for two hours poured out a flow of eloquent tribute to and understanding of the writer whose memory he said he loved more than any one since Christ, we felt we had had nothing so good since Dickens himself.

Nearly five years passed before for the first time the asterisk with its mystical meaning was placed against the name of any one of our active members. Our page in memoriam shows names distinguished in life by rarest endowment of talents; one whose name is there put by in remembrance once wrote to me, "be proud, be proud of your club, the brain man has been there," and so deep was her attachment for her club that the weeks in which there were no Dickens *causeries* she called "the vacant weeks." There are also the names of two who have graced the office of Vice-President of this society: one with a nature rare, rich, and beautiful in all the relations of maiden, daughter, wife, mother, and friend; our more recent loss a year ago, the brave soul sublimely patient who never ceased her kind thoughtfulness for all who came under her sweet influence.

We are not afflicted with what Howard Crosbie called the "delirium tremens of club life."

There is not the tremendous strain upon this club of trying to do *every* good thing under the sun, we only aim to do one thing well! Professor Churchill, who gave the high light of his sympathy and interest to this club, once said to me, "to know one great author thoroughly is to open the door into an earthly omniscience."

Familiarized by long acquaintance with every characteristic of the ideal persons, the magnificent multitude of the writer's imagination, they are yet, I am free to say, ever fresh, ever attractive to us all. Upon the grand religious spirit of his work, his reverence for sacred things, I have always dwelt. Thackeray and Dickens have been compared as the physician and surgeon respectively of human nature. I like very much to repeat what the Rev. A. N. Blatchford of Bristol, England, said recently, of the dealing with evil by the two writers, Thackeray, he says, "puts the knife in fearlessly, but Dickens in his sympathetic handling gets his healing plaister ready for the scar and sends humanity on its way strengthened. Squalor and misery he treated with hope."

"Our Euripides the human
With his droppings of warm tears
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres!"

There can hardly be a "decadence of Dickens" when for many years the sales of one publishing house have averaged 250,000 copies of his works; they are translated into every European language. Thousands of copies it is said are sold every year in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. Every librarian in the English reading world can testify that he has been in the past few years to the fore more than any author living or dead; his fame is inextinguishable despite those writers who wonder at "the curiously persistent worship of Dickens" and can see him only in a "dim perspective."

In the beginning I raised a high standard for my club. I am proud to-day that we have kept to it. There come to me constantly cordial wishes for a beautiful success from many parts where Dickens is read and loved, and in the club a most generous spirit of co-operation prevails. To our club motto then, "Stand by," in its broadest translation, there is no need for reference.

With a mind filled with grateful tenderness and many grateful remembrances I hope to enter with you, my associates, upon another decade of work. May success attend our Club.

ADELAIDE H. GARLAND

ON the last birthday anniversary of Charles Dickens, which was celebrated by the All Around Dickens Club, an editor of a Boston newspaper referred to the scene on the New York docks, viewed for the first time by Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley, and quoted from Dickens's description of the spectacle which has proved to be a prophetic representation of "Yellow Journalism" of our own generation. In the course of our club readings in the past months, we have also found Dickens a seer for the counterparts of organizations like "The Sisterhood of Mediaeval Marys," "Women of England," "Daughters of Britain," "Sisters of all the Cardinal Virtues separately," "Females of America" and Ladies of a hundred denominations exist to-day, and Mrs. Pardiggle's prototype is not an impossibility — the indefatigable woman, who during the revolving duties of a day figured as a school lady, a visiting lady, a reading lady, a distributing lady, and claimed that the exercise did her good. Not many weeks before his death Charles Dickens acknowledged a toast to literature, and did so on behalf of the sisterhood as well as the brotherhood of literature and most happily prophesied of the time when he might see the better half of human nature sitting in the President's chair. Had he lived until the present day, he could have felt only satisfaction and pride in seeing the "Chair" of the All Around Dickens Club occupied by the lady who founded this society ten years ago and who has laboured unceasingly to perpetuate his memory and keep it green. As one who has been

closely associated with her in the executive work and an observer of the unanimity existing between her and all of the members, I feel that our present success results from this accord, for all have *stood by* for the good of the club, fully realizing that thwarted harmony would be disastrous to its advancement. We have worked also for the love of our work, deriving enthusiasm from our President's untiring devotion and, like the boys at Dr. Strong's school, "We all felt that we had a part in the management and in sustaining its character and dignity, hence we soon became warmly attached to it." On the behalf of every member of our club I wish our beloved President, who is the right woman in the right place, the greatest success in the future and will only add the familiar words spoken at another anniversary: "Here's to her. There never was another woman like her."

LYDIA PARSONS, *Secretary*,
All Around Dickens Club.

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